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SOMETHING ABOUT WINE

JOSEPH GARNEAU RINGWALT

1920

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SOMETHING ABOUT WINE

[Josep Garnoa Ringwalt,]

This small booklet is an attempt to briefly meet an ever increasing demand for information on a fascinating subject. Credit for much of the information contained herein is given to

THE BRITISH ECONOMIC COMMITTEE ON "WINE"

MR. H. WARNER ALLEN

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MONSIEURS

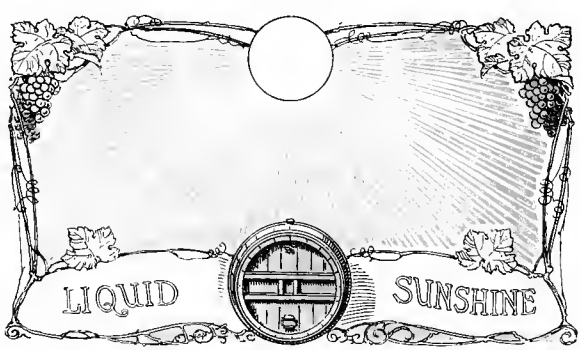
GEORGES CHAPPAZ AND

ALEXANDRE HENRIOT

DEFINITION AND TYPES

WINE is the product of the alcoholic fermentation of the juice of sound ripe grapes. Red wine is made from purple grapes and contains the coloring matter of the skins. White wines are usually made from white grapes, but may also be made from purple grapes if the coloring matter of the skins is not permitted to enter the wine.

In the trade, wines are frequently divided into two general classifications: dry or sweet. Among the dry wines are Red and White Bordeaux, Burgundy, Rhine and Moselle, as well as those that are bottled before a second fermentation such as champagne and sparkling wine. Dry wines range in alcoholic strength from eight to fourteen percent by volume. Among the sweet or fortified wines are port and sherry, which are usually shipped to this country at about twenty percent alcohol.



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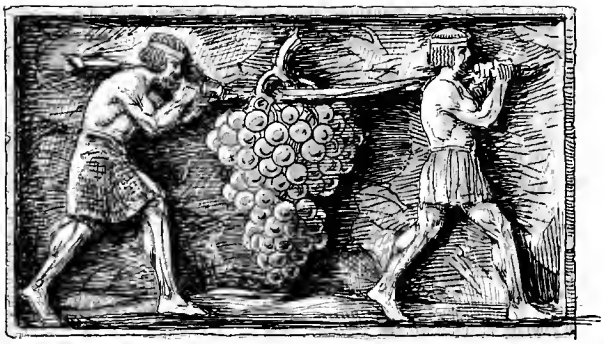


THE wine trade is probably one of the oldest. The Book of Genesis tells us that Noah planted a vineyard and made wine. Vineyards were extensively cultivated in China four thousand years ago. The oldest monuments of the Egyptians and Assyrians show that the cultivation of wine had been highly developed. The Romans were highly proficient in the production of wines and introduced this art into France and Germany during the early Christian era.

QUALITY

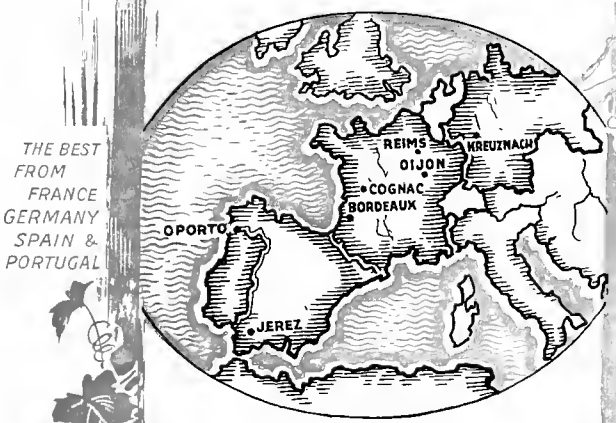
THE world's annual production of wine is about four thousand million gallons. A very small proportion contains quality which will pay for the care, attention and investment while it matures. The trade in these wines is mostly with the older wine-producing countries—France, Germany, Spain and Portugal.

The type of wines is affected by the variety of the grapes and the nature of the soil. The quality is affected by the climate, soil and altitude, and will vary according to weather conditions prevailing from year to year. It depends upon the time at which the grapes are picked, the weather and other conditions at the time of fermentation, the maturity and treatment before bottling, the time of bottling and the age of the wine in bottle. Quality can be obtained only at the expense of quantity.

WINE MUST PASS THE TEST

FOOD AND MEDICINAL VALUE

WINE should be considered as a liquid food rather than a beverage. It contains a large percentage of health-giving vitamins, it stimulates the digestive organs, enriches the blood and builds up the entire system. Pasteur has described wine as the most wholesome and health-giving of drinks. Other authorities have estimated the food value in one liter (about one quart) of wine to be equivalent to 0.9 liter of milk, 5 eggs, 370 grams of bread or 585 grams of meat without bone. Wine is used as a remedy for dyspeptic conditions, general fatigue and nervousness, and in certain infectious diseases. The beneficial effects of wine in convalescence are generally recognized. Champagne has a sedative action on the stomach, at the same time giving nourishment and a slight stimulation. The moderate use of wine is usually beneficial; the abuse of anything is to be condemned.



APPRECIATION

WINE is nature's work of art, a tribute to food, a luxury, and often a necessary tonic. It is not a mere chemical composition but a thing of life which possesses character and exhales a fragrance of strange flowers and fruits. In a combined effect upon the senses wine causes a mingling of pleasant emotions. It animates the spirit, generates good humor and inspires the generous side of human nature.

Pictures, music and wine may be good, bad or indifferent and can be best judged by the connoisseur who can see, hear or taste with appreciation. Good wine should receive respect and even reverence.

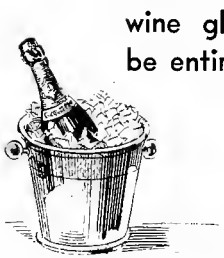
APPRECIATION

THE wine connoisseur will anticipate with pleasure the first sample of the wine to be served. He will probably take the opportunity to call his guest's attention, and to concentrate on the pleasure at hand. He will first notice the clear, transparent color varying in intensity. Next he will sense the bouquet which varies in character with the age and quality of the wine. He may intensify this fragrance by warming the glass of wine in the palm of his hand and by slightly agitating the glass to bring a greater portion of the contents into contact with the air. Finally, he will sip a small quantity and hold it in his mouth, not to be swallowed hastily but rather to be absorbed slowly, and carefully reflected upon. A fine wine will pass this final test when held in the mouth, leaving no suspicion of an unpleasant flavor.

STORING AND SERVING

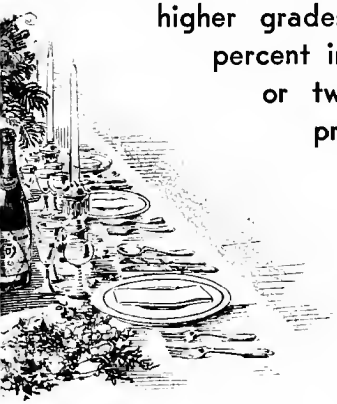
WINE in bottles should be stored in a lying position and, as far as possible, in a dark, cool cellar. The position will keep the cork wet and prevent air from reaching the wine. The location will assure the desired uniform temperature.

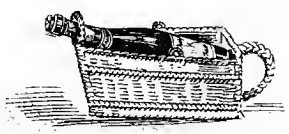
A sediment frequently appears in wine varying according to type and vintage, but does not denote poor quality nor deterioration, but rather indicates qualities found in old wines. Such sediment may be part of natural wine but it need not appear in the glasses if care is taken in pouring from the bottle. The taste of the wine is not affected by this feature. Red wines should be served at the temperature of the room, and are frequently transferred into decanters one or two hours before serving. White wines should be served colder and may be iced if desired. They should be poured directly from the bottle. If more than one wine is served, oyster and fish courses are accompanied by white wine; and roasts by red wine. Young and light bodied wines are served before the older and heavier bodied wines. The wine glass should not be entirely filled.



COST OF WINE

IT IS said that wine "maketh glad the heart of man," but it is even more surely "a commodity which governments delight to tax." Wines in this country are subject to very high specific taxes based not on the value or quality, but on the quantity and alcoholic content. Most of the cost of wine is due to these and other fixed charges in which the question of quality does not enter. The cultivation and care of the vineyards, the picking, sorting, transportation and crushing of the grapes, the fermentation, storage, racking and clarifying of the wine; the labor and material in connection with the bottling, labeling, corking, capping, casing and shipping of the mature wine; the freight, insurance, cartage and storage, as well as selling and overhead expenses are fixed charges in which the question of quality does not enter. It is therefore a simple process of reasoning that value in wines can be better obtained in the medium or higher grades. A difference of ten percent in the cost may give one or two hundred percent improvement in quality.





CHAMPAGNE

CHAMPAGNE has for ages been the "Wine of Fashion." It is reported that it was first introduced into England by the "Merrie Monarch" King Charles as a fitting tribute to the luxury, gaiety and sparkling wit of his time. The unqualified title of champagne belongs exclusively to wines made from grapes grown in the limited champagne district of northern France, of which Reims is the center. Although this district is small, no one part thereof can produce a wine containing all the qualities to be found in good champagne. It is therefore the expert blending in the proper proportions, irrespective of cost, by certain champagne houses which produces a wine of delicacy, freshness, softness, fragrance, body and bouquet—in short, a wine of lighthearted, irresponsible gaiety for the fortunate consumer.

One or two outstanding producers give a blend of the best vintage qualities without specifying or limiting themselves to a designated year on the bottle, thereby obtaining year after year uniform quality body and bouquet.

CHAMPAGNE

CHAMPAGNE is made mostly from black grapes and care must be taken that they are not sufficiently crushed to permit the skins to discolor the wine. The first fermentation takes place in casks. The blending is done in midwinter and the wine is bottled in the spring, after which further fermentation takes place in the bottle and produces the natural sparking condition, the leaping pearls of air, characteristic of champagne. The champagne in bottles is stored in tiers to ferment for about four years and then placed in racks with corks down. They receive skillful shaking at regular intervals which causes all sediment to collect in the neck of the bottle. This portion of the bottle is then placed into a freezing mixture which enables the accumulated sediment to be removed without the loss of any of the precious liquid. The cork is removed, the sediment disgorged, and a new cork inserted in the bottle. An age of five or more years is attained in the elaborate process of perfecting champagne before it is shipped out for consumption. There was recently celebrated the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the discovery by a Benedictine Monk of this natural process to produce champagne. With proper storage, champagne will keep for twenty years after shipment.

BORDEAUX WINES

BORDEAUX has been called the queen of natural wines. The grapes are grown along the warm valley of the Gironde River in the southwestern part of France. There is charm in the delicacy and elegance of the taste, and in the bouquet of the better grades. The Red Bordeaux wines, sometimes called clarets, contain less sugar, alcohol and acid than other wines. To obtain the quality so necessary for perfect enjoyment, reliance should be placed upon the shipper rather than upon a name given wine upon the label of a bottle. The words "Bottled at the Chateau" are not guarantees. Poor vintages and inferior qualities may be "bottled at the Chateau." Much more dependable is the name of a reputable producer who has the proper facilities for the selection, storage, treatment, bottling and aging of the wines. Some popular Red Bordeaux Wines are Medoc, Saint Julien, Chateau Pontet Canet, Chateau Larose, Chateau Margaux, Chateau Lafite and Chateau Mouton Rothschild. Red wines spoil after a few hours when exposed to the air but when properly sealed and stored will improve for thirty or forty years in the bottle. The white Bordeaux wines, sometimes called Sauternes, do not improve after the first year in the bottle. They are sweeter than most natural wines. The more popular are Graves, Sauternes, Haut Sauternes, Chateau La Tour Blanche, and Chateau Yquem.

Courtesy of Cruse et Fils Freres

BURGUNDY WINES

BURGUNDY has been called the king of natural wines. It is usually fuller in body, more substantial and richer in flavor than the Bordeaux wines. It is grown amid rolling hills in a district of eastern France known as the "Cote d'Or" or Golden Hills. The more popular names for the red Burgundies are Macon, Beaune, Pommard, Chambertin; and for the white Burgundies, Chablis.

GERMAN WINES

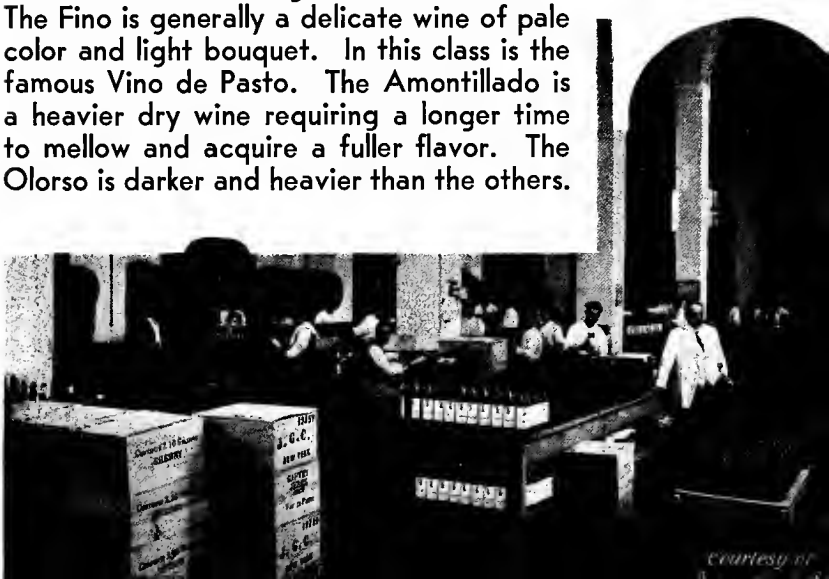
THE valleys of the Rhine and the Moselle in Southern Germany have long been famous for their light wines. The almost perpendicular hills bordering the River Rhine are terraced to hold the vines which cover their sides. Picturesque old castles appear frequently at vantage points. The better grades are of exceptionally fine flavor and delicate aroma. These wines are usually white or amber color, of light body and low alcoholic strength. According to their origin German wines are divided into two groups: Rhine wines and Moselle wines. The former are more rounded and more gold-colored; the latter are lighter in body and drier. Some of the better known Rhine wines are Laubenheimer, Niersteiner, Rudesheimer, Liebfraumilch, Johannisberger; and among the Moselle wines, Zeltinger, Piesporter, Brauneberger and Berncasteler. The vintage of 1921 brought Germany the "Wine of the Century." The best known estate is that of the Prussian (formerly Royal) Domain. A certain Rhine wine of this famous vintage, grown on the Prussian Domain, brought at auction 172 marks (approximately $43.00) per bottle.

SHERRIES

THE source of true sherry is the district around Jerez in southern Spain, from which town it derives the name. It is a fortified wine in that grape brandy has been added thereto. The sherry shipped to this country usually contains about twenty percent of alcohol by volume. Unlike most wines, which are stored and aged in cellars, sherry is kept above ground in buildings called Bodegas. Large vats contain various characters and types of sherry, the style of which is unvaryingly kept by adding thereto wines of the same description. Certain quantities taken from various vats are blended to give the style, body and character desired. Good sherry has a fine and delicate taste with a well-developed bouquet. It is fast regaining its position as the ideal appetizer. The making of sherry is a long and expensive process so that cheap sherries are likely to be false or bad sherries.

Sherries have three general classifications. The Fino is generally a delicate wine of pale color and light bouquet. In this class is the famous Vino de Pasto. The Amontillado is a heavier dry wine requiring a longer time to mellow and acquire a fuller flavor. The Olorso is darker and heavier than the others.

LABELING AND PACKING SHERRY WINE IN SPAIN



courtesy of

PORTS

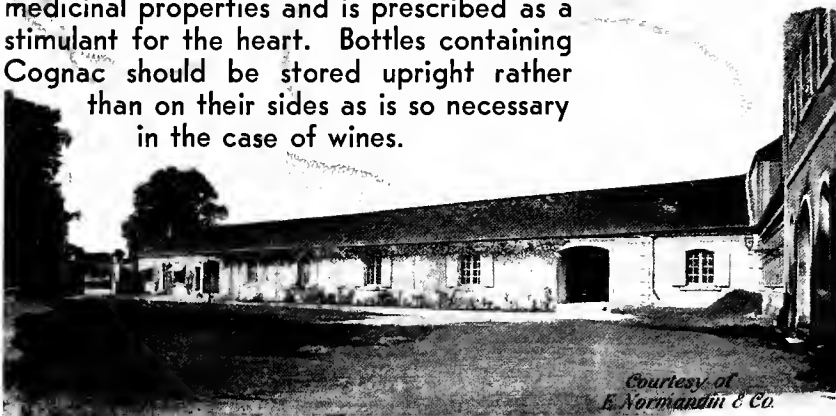
THE source of true Port is the mountainous regions along the Douro River in the northern part of Portugal and about fifty miles from the harbor at Oporto, from which town the wine derives its name. The finest vineyards or "Quintas" extend upwards from the banks of the river upon terraced slopes exposed to the sun. Port is a fortified sweet wine in that brandy is added at a certain stage before fermentation is complete and usually contains about twenty percent of alcohol by volume.

After fermentation the wine is stored in large casks or pipes and in January or February is transported down the river to warehouses where it matures. It is bottled from two to four years after production and continues to improve in the bottle for many years. Sediment is a natural development in port wine. It has fullness of body and a rich fruity taste. The value of port as an aid to digestion is generally recognized. As in the case of other wines, there is no such thing as a cheap good port. The increased cost of good wine is repaid many fold in value.

COGNAC BRANDY

BRANDY deserves a place in this booklet inasmuch as it is a product of wine, being distilled from the fermented juice of sound ripe grapes. Brandy has no geographic significance as it may be distilled wherever wine is available. Any wine may be distilled but it is generally conceded that none yields a brandy comparable to Cognac Brandy.

Cognac is a small town on the Charente River in the western part of France and is surrounded by carefully cultivated vineyards. The name Cognac has a geographical meaning and cannot be given to any brandy other than that distilled from wine produced in the strictly limited Cognac district made famous for the excellence of this product. The utmost care is given to every phase of Cognac production. The grapes are carefully selected, the wine will have quality, the aging casks must be without blemish, and the surrounding conditions strictly regulated. Good brandy will continue to improve in wood over a long period of years and develops an unexcelled delicacy and bouquet. Cognac Brandy has many staunch admirers. It enjoys special medicinal properties and is prescribed as a stimulant for the heart. Bottles containing Cognac should be stored upright rather than on their sides as is so necessary in the case of wines.



TYPE OF BUILDING USED TO AGE COGNAC BRANDY

Courtesy of E. Normandin & Co.

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